



August 16, 2006

Dr. Edward L. Root
Chairman, Maryland State Board of Education
Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building
200 West Baltimore St.
Baltimore, MD 21201 - 2595

Dear Dr. Root:

I urge your immediate action to improve the Baltimore City Public School System by reopening the application process and aggressively recruiting highly qualified candidates to serve on the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. Our students and parents deserve a responsive Board that acts prudently and inclusively to provide our children with the greatest opportunity possible.

Recent troubling and undisclosed actions of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners are stunning and disappointing. The public is just now learning that more than two months ago, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, without adequate public comment and hearings, voted to reduce the minimum passing grades for reading, mathematics, and science classes throughout all 12 grades.

Moreover, the City school system maintains an indefensible policy on social promotion for elementary and middle school students. Specifically, the policy states that students who have been held back one year due to poor performance "should be promoted, even if the student does not meet the standards for promotion."

With each passing day, I lose confidence in the management of the school system. The facts are stunning in their depiction of systemic failure:

- Of the 189 public schools in Baltimore city, 89 (47%) are in some stage of School Improvement; 54 (29%) are in the deepest stage of School Improvement Restructuring Implementation.

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- Six schools are currently identified as being “Persistently Dangerous” as required by federal law. No other school system in Maryland has a School identified as Persistently Dangerous.
- At all levels (elementary, middle and high) Baltimore City has the lowest attendance rate of all 24 school systems.
- According to a recent report by *Education Week*, of the 50 largest school systems in the United States, Baltimore City is ranked #49 with a graduation rate of 38.5%. Neighboring Baltimore County is ranked #3 with a graduation rate of 81.9%.
- Baltimore City’s dropout rate is three times the State average.
- Baltimore City has the highest percentage of teachers teaching with a Conditional Certificate out of all school systems in Maryland.
- In Baltimore City only 35% of Kindergarten students are rated as “fully ready” to enter school, despite robust Head Start programs and pre-K programs that have been in place for years.
- The performance of Baltimore City’s students on the High School Assessments in Algebra, English 2, and Biology is the lowest among the State’s 24 school systems.
- The State Prosecutor has made 10 convictions in corruption cases in Baltimore City public schools over the past few years.

Baltimore City has been granted more and more time to improve achievement in these troubled schools. Little or no progress has been made despite the fact that Baltimore City receives more funding than any other jurisdiction, \$9,446 per pupil. By comparison, the statewide average is \$5,362 per pupil.

I appreciate your leadership, the State Board of Education, and Superintendent Grasmick to help the City schools as much as possible within the confines of the law. With last year’s federal court order for the State to manage the special education component of the City Schools, I know you are working with your team to improve services for children with disabilities who have long been denied their education. In addition, your effort earlier this year to improve performance and accountability at the worst 11 schools in the City is the right thing to do. Marylanders expect that the funding the State provides the City will result in strong schools and well educated children. Accountability to provide our children opportunity is of paramount importance.

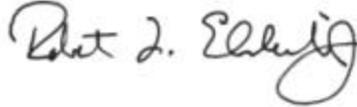
Given the troubling performance of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners and the continued failure of the school system, those board members eligible for removal must be replaced as quickly as possible. The Board’s decision to lower expectations for students with such enormous potential is unacceptable. As you know, I retain joint control of appointments to this Board with the Mayor of the City. I understand we have a historic opportunity to immediately appoint five highly qualified individuals to the nine member board. I ask that you reopen the

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application process to search for the best citizens possible to turn this failing school system around and forward those names right away.

Thank you for your leadership and our shared vision of excellence in Maryland public schools. I look forward to your efforts to improve Baltimore's troubled schools.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.
Governor